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Lowellville, Ohio

Personal Experience

O.H. 945

STANLEY ZELINKA

Interviewed

by

Tom Kirker

on

August 9, 1985

K: This is an interview with Stanley Zelinka for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on the history of Lowellville and Quakertown, on August 9, 1985, by Tom Kirker, at Stymie Road, Lowellville, Ohio, at 4:30 p.m.

Where and when were you born?

Z: I was born in Chicago on November 1, 1913. In that same year, my dad picked up and came to a little village that was called Quaker Falls, Pennsylvania.

K: What made him decide to come to Quaker Falls?

Z: One of the reasons that was probably more interesting to him to come here was because his brother was already here. He was being employed by the Gricella Powder Company.

K: What job did your dad and his brother have with the powder company?

Z: My dad mostly odds and ends, or labor, because he had no particular trade. He did just what they demanded. It was mostly manual labor.

K: Where was the plant located at?

Z: The plant would be located as you come into Pennsylvania from the Ohio border line from the present highway, which is Route 224. It was approximately the whole side of that. At that time, it probably had about twenty-five acres.

K: Do you know how many men worked there?

Z: I would say that the workforce was not very large. Each one of those particular shanties that we called, at that time, were employed by one or two men. I would say roughly that on the three shifts, they employed one-hundred men.

K: Were there many explosions?

Z: Definitely. That was probably one of the most interesting things living down in that neighborhood. When I was just a youngster, a big cloud came up in a threatening storm. I recall on an occasion that there was a little schoolhouse with two rooms up by what was called Carbon along side of Vantage's store. Neither one is there anymore. We were playing on the merry-go-round or "ring around the roses." All of a sudden, there was this big bang. I looked up into the sky. That is the only time that I ever did witness that thing blow up. The closest thing that I ever saw was something like the mushroom of the atomic bomb. There was big, white smoke, tin, and other pieces flying through the air. It was really scary.

K: Do you remember how old you were?

Z: I would say, at that time, that I was in the fourth grade.

K: Was your dad ever injured?

Z: No. Later on, he left there. He did a little bit of work around the house, and also, he got a job at the Carbon Limestone, which was the nest closest industry, at that time. That is where it all kind of ended up.

K: Did the man who lived there work for that powder mill make a good living?

Z: At that time, the pay was very small. Most of the people who worked there were single. My dad lived in one of the homes that the Quakers had built years ago. It was a thirteen room house with a great, big barn behind the house. Most of the people who migrated to this area who worked at the plant would sell the powder. If they worked at the Carbon Limestone Company, then, there was Johnston they would live with my dad because they had this big boarding house. Also, the next door neighbors, a fellow by the name Yelich, also had a big home.

In those days, if you were of the Croation descent, you usually went where all of the Croation lived because they would converse and because their English language was very limited and poor. Of course, that also applied to the Italians. When they migrated to this area, they went to Hillsville or into Lowellville. That is where they would live. They would converse with the other Italian people.

K: How many Croation people were there, at that time?

Z: At that time, that would include Carbon and this little village where the Quakers had settled one-hundred and sixty years ago. I would assume that at one time, it would probably have twenty-five to thirty boarders, as my dad would say. Next door, they had about twenty. Then there was a family who lived up on what was the old 224 that went through Carbon. They had a big boarding house. They also had about thirty boarders, which later was occupied by the family called Matt Jerrig, who also started one of the early stores in the community there. Also, most of the homes, at that time and in my time, were occupied by the descendants who were Croation and Serbians. There were a few Italian families in, and they mostly lived in Hillsville.

K: With that many people in one house, did you have special chores to do?

Z: Probably one of the biggest chores that I had was to try to get out of the way of my dad and mother because I did not like to work. I was very mischievous.

What was amazing was that as I grew older and was able to grasp some of the things. It was rather interesting to see these people in the evening. My dad had a great,

big table in this great, big room. They would sit there. My dad would always butcher about seven or eight pigs. He had four or five cows. In the winter time when the weather got really cold, he would come from work, and they would sit at the table. They would drink homemade wine, which my dad made, as high as twenty-five barrels a year. Some of them, by bedtime, were feeling pretty good.

I recall, when I was a youngster, that there was a gentlemen there who we called dobli boy. In Croation, that means the good. I also recall, when I was a youngster, that there was a gentleman there who we called dobli boys. In Croation, that means the good fellow. He was a very joyful individual. I seemed like every night they would like to get him feeling pretty good. Then, he would get an instrument. It was very crude. In fact, I have only seen it once. He would play that like a bass fiddle between his knees, and he would sing. that gentleman would sing these old Croation songs, and he would sing there for hours. That is the only entertainment that they had because there was no radio, no telephone, or no television.

On a Saturday or Sunday, I would have to sit there four or five hours and barbeque this lamb on this long stick. That was another job that I did not like. They would drink and have a good time. After that, they would eat, and then, they would have a little game. One was horseshoes. Another one was when they would get a pretty good sized stone, and they would draw a line. You would see who could throw the furthest. Whoever won the throw would have to buy the drink.

Later, I thought that was very interesting. When you are in a strange country with a strange environment and different people, it is a problem killing time or entertaining yourself, which they very well did. Of course, in later years, the situation improved. There were two Croation fellows by the names of Joe Lenodich and John Kusyk who were partners. They had two pool tables, and they had two bowling alleys. I was just a youngster. I used to set up pins.

K: Where was this at?

Z: What would be called Carbon now. I would get five cents a line. That was not a lot of money, but at least it killed time. It also was a lot of pastime entertainment. Most of the boarders were all single. They would go there and play pool.

Another game that they indulged in a lot was cards. They played rummy and stuff. I know that my dad used to go there and play pool. They would end up playing all night long at fifty cents a game for rummy. That was interesting.

K: What was Christmas like when you lived in that big house?

Z: Most of the people that immigrated to this country were illiterate, and they could not read or write. For some obvious reason, they were very religious. I recall every night when I went to bed, all four of us would have to sit. Mother would make us repeat Hail Mary three times. All of those people were very religious. To them, Christmas was a big holiday. That was one of the big events of the year. The next one for Croation came a

couple of days later. That was Saint Stephan Day. They also talked a lot about that, and they celebrated. All of these other ones were secondary. Of course, Easter was an important holiday, too.

K: Was there a lot of food and games?

Z: At Christmas, my dad would set up a big tree. There would be a lot of fruit. There would be a lot of homemade wine, and he also was very good at making moonshine.

K: Did your mom make Croation foods? When did your parents come to this country?

Z: My dad first migrated to this country in 1907. He came to Chicago. At that time, that was where his other brothers were staying. Then, he worked about three or three and a half years. He went back and got married and then came back here.

K: Do you know how old he was?

Z: I imagine that my dad was pretty young. My dad died in 1946, and he was only sixty-three years old.

K: How many brothers and sisters do you have?

Z: I have two sisters. One passed away early in life. The other one is still living. She lives right up on New Middletown Road. I have one brother named Pete who lived three doors from here. I have another brother who lives up on 224 named John. There were four of us in the family.

K: You went into the auto business?

Z: Yes, I went into that.

K: What can you recall about Quakertown when you were living there? Was there much of the town left?

Z: I can recall vividly that there was a home across the P Company Track. It was big and beautiful. In those days, you could call it a mansion. It was made out of stone. That is where the early settlers of the Amish, who was supposedly like a mayor or a leader, lived. In my time, there was, of course, a family who lived there by the name of Schotts. They moved out, and the family who moved in later I knew very well. I went to school with the kids. It was a large family.

On this side of the railroad tracks, there was a wooden bridge. All of those across the tracks would come down past my dad's house, down in the valley. Somehow or other, the thing deteriorated, and it fell apart. In those days, the county or the township, nobody

fixed it. People who used the track had a hard time. People on this side of the track were known by the name of Panneck. Then, you come up the hill to the next house. That is where my dad lived. That is the only house that had the big barn that the Amish built with this big, thirteen room house. All of these families, at that time, were Slavs descendants. There was one just above us by the name of Stankovich. He also had boarders. The next house was a family by the name of Piskovich, who also was of Croation descent. She migrated here, and when she got married, the wedding was held in my dad's house. In between her house and the next house was a big, stone house where Gricella Powder Company used to keep records and stuff. Eventually, that was torn down, but that was built out of good sized stone. Across from this big, stone house was a cellar lift along side the quarry where the Amish used to dig up the stone and build this. It was store at one time. People by the name of Baldine owned it. The next house was the most modern house. People by the name of Jackowich's lived there. Then they moved out to Struthers. There was a family by the name of Chick's who I went to school with. At that time, that would be six homes, and they were occupied all by Slav descendants.

Later, of course, my dad moved and so did all of the other ones. The kids would come in and destroy it. When the Stanish's moved, they moved to over here in Lansingville. They were there maybe a year or so, and they did not like it. They went back, but the kids just destroyed everything. There was not much left at all. There was an old gentleman. He had one leg missing, and he also had problems with one arm. He lived down there. Different people there would feed him every day. He lived there for a couple of years.

It was really interesting because, like I said, every once in a while, the old powder works would blow up. When I was a youngster, also, it was amazing to that I never got in trouble with the one falls, and then, it caved in. There was a second one. Under it, you would walk the one. That would be all covered with green moss. That is slippery. It was just like a bowl, and it is still down there. It was deep. A lot of the older kids would go in there and swim. It was a lot of fun.

I recall one year also at the end of the school term, we took a stroll down there. There was a second falls down in that valley. There was a stone there that is probably as big as this room. We would get up on that stone wall, walk around, jump, and just yell our brains out. It was crude in its sense, but on the other hand, it was interesting, too. I enjoyed every bit.

I also used to come up the road. There was a big barn. The Gricelli Powder Company was there. In those days in the early parts, there were not any automobiles. They had a truck that had solid tires. We used to go into this barn, get on top of the girders, and then, jump down into the loft of hay. Then, if we were not satisfied with that, we would go across the road. There was a big dam, and we jumped into that and went swimming. Up on top of the other side of the dam were two, large oak trees.

This gentleman, Joe Leper, had one-half of the school. His sister had the other half who later became Mrs. George Kuhn. As I got out of high school and went to work, the first job that I got was with Carbon Limestone. The same school teacher was a

superintendent there to one part, and his brother-in-law, George Kuhn, was in charge of the quarry. It was kind of a small, small world. I do not know what happened, but I went there one year, first grade, and the doggone school burnt down. Whether it was arson or what, I do not know. It was probably the second or the third school built, at that time, in Mahoning Township.

K: How many people were in that school?

Z: To be honest with you, I am not quite sure.

K: What high school did you go to?

Z: I went to Bessemer High School in Bessemer, Pennsylvania. When I graduated, there were thirty-five of us who graduated.

K: When you were living in Quakertown, where was the closest store?

Z: The closest store was pretty close. At the present time, it is a building that is still there. I would say that it would have been about less than one-quarter of a mile walk from where I lived. You went past this old barn that I was telling you about. Then, there was bridge and you took the shortcut up over the hill where the old 224 used to come. It was across the highway from the big boardinghouse. At one time, there was a Croatian fellow by the name of Richavich, Jerry Richavich, and then Burton Down. They moved up close to the Carbon Limestone office. There was a big building there. They had a store there until the built a new one in the same place. Then, a fellow by the name of Vantage owned it until he passed away. He was my neighbor. He lived about the fourth door down from here. The old building is still there.
Also, the old barber shop is still there. I used to work behind the counter. I used to have the showcases slanted down. I sold candy and ice cream. I was just a youngster in grade school. The proprietor was the barber. He used to sell ice cream for five cents a cone.

K: Where did you go to church at? Where was the Catholic church?

Z: Most of us went to Hillsville. They called it Brier Hill. It was an old, wooden building. Route 224 goes right by it as an overpass. It is on the left-hand side. In later years, that old building burnt down. Then they built a new one, which is still there. It was almost a replica of the old, wooden one. Somebody wanted it modernized, so they built one up on the hill, which is a larger church. They just completed a recreational hall there, too. At that time, you had to walk. Of course, in later years, they did have busses. They ran from Lowellville to Bessemer and back.

When I was a youngster and I got to know what was what, they had gittanias. They ran through from Lowellville to Hillsville to Bessemer. A lot of people who came to this country got up there in those hills. Then, they had the buses. Then, you got on the

streetcar. You went east down through Edinboro. There was a bicycle path where all of these youngsters could ride their bicycled. If you wanted to go west of Youngstown to Campbell, you got on right there in front of Valello's, which is still there. That is where they used to turn around. Some went straight through, and others would turn around and go back to Youngstown. I used to ride them occasionally.

I also used to ride the trains. The last train that we took was just before the passenger service went out. The Lowellville merchants had Carnell Lake Park. Then, there was Cascade Park. When I was a kid on Lowellville Merchants' Day, the streetcar would run you right into Cascade Park. He would take it and then come back home. That was really exciting. The last one that I took was on the south side of the river. It ran all the way up into Conneaut. Since then, I have never been on a train. A lot of people did a lot of traveling then by train.

K: Was there a doctor in Quakertown?

Z: No. There were no doctors. We had very little conveniences to live with. We had homes and the store. If you got the mail, you had to go to Lowellville because they did not deliver mail, or you had to go to Hillsville. They had a post office there. They still have the old post office. Although they built a new one in Hillsville.

I recall when I was younger that when we walked to school, we used to go past the blacksmith's shop. We would stop and watch the old blacksmith. He was a fine old gentleman. He also was the Justice of the Peace. His name was Jim Acken. From there if we had time, we go over and stop at the post office. They had a great, bit belly-stove. We would sit in there and warm up a little bit, and then, we would shoot out the back door to the school. That was really nice.

Regardless of how cold it was, we had to walk. In those days, they did not all get on busses. You walked, but we went there one year. Then, they were back. They built a room right there in Carbon. We had school right there, which made it a lot easier.

Of course, when I came into the eighth grade, there was only three of us. We decided that we would have to walk to Hillsville. Back again, I had to walk. I walked there everybody. It was an old schoolhouse. It is already torn down and gone. From there I went to Bessemer. That kind of changed the schedule a little bit because I had a bus to ride every morning. I did not have to walk anymore.

K: Did most of the people you went to school with stay in the area?

Z: Yes, I would say that ninety percent of them stayed for the simple reason that when I graduated from high school, there were opportunities available, especially graduating during the Depression. After the war broke out and the steel industry had revival, there were a lot of jobs. At one time, even out here, there were about six quarries operating. There were a lot of jobs there. The young people who did not graduate had no problem finding a job, which is just the opposite of the situation today. The steel mills in our valley here are disappearing. some are being torn down. Others that are standing are

rusting away. Otherwise, there are no jobs. All of the kids that I graduated with when we had our reunion practically, all of them were here.

A lot of people could not quite understand why some people did not stay. You could visualize it yourself. The terrain is not very good for farming. Another thing is that river when they used to get a big storm. I lived up on top of the hill. I could look down. You would see water laying all around that place.

K: When you were younger, were there a lot of vacant houses?

Z: No. Those homes were always occupied. Those people who worked there and those people who migrated to this part as I previously had mentioned would end up at my dad's or next door. Up about one-hundred yards from there, there was another big boarding house. It was not until I would say in the 1930's and 1940's when a lot of them were getting married and raising their own families. Then, they would build their own homes, which I knew quite a few of them, but those homes were not destroyed. Some of them could have still been used. The structure on them was very good. When they built the barns and the homes, they did a very good job. The barn and the house that my folks lived in could have lasted another one-hundred years.

K: When you were younger, did you have a bicycle? Was there a bakery in Quakertown?

Z: No, he used to come from Bessemer. There were two bakers. One was by the name of Ernest Percy. He had one. Then, there was another one. In fact, right after I got married, I lived there awhile in a house. He used to come to my dad's house. That would be his last stop in Quakertown. He would bring the bread in. Then, he would come in. He brought the bread in himself. He would have one-quarter of wine and sit at the table. He would take that bread, break it up, and then, dunk it in that wine. Then, he would eat it. When he finished the wine and the bread, he marked down what we got because we always paid at the end of the month. We would take off.

K: What was life like during the Depression? Were you still in Quakertown at the time?

Z: No. I graduated in 1933. I lived out at Carbon in some old farmhouse. We moved from little Quakertown to over here just about one-quarter of a mile from here where the old Smith clan is at. It was an old, wooden farmhouse. Then my dad bought this barn off of this fellow with the understanding that he was to get first chance at buying the whole farm. That never did materialize. During the Depression, a lot of the people who lived in Quakertown, Carbon, and Hillsville were first generation immigrants who immigrated to this country. They were hard working people. They also knew how to make things stretch like my dad. He had a big garden. He had chickens, pigs, and cows. A lot of the food that he put on the table, and all of these other ones that did the same thing. They put the food on the table that they raised in their back yard in the garden. They did not suffer as much as some of those who lived in the city and had to go and buy it. We never

suffered because my dad always had something to eat.

K: How did you meet your wife?

Z: This lady, at one time, was my neighbor. This is going back to Quaker Falls. I was telling you the most modern house was right on top of the hill, close to the railroad tracks. She lived there, and her husband and she had a son. They built a beautiful home in Struthers on Seventh Street and Prospect. They were my mother-in-law and my wife's neighbors. Then, she passed away. Back in those days, they did not take you to a funeral parlor. They would have you laid out at home in the living room. I went down to pay her my last respects because I always had a lot of respect for her. She was a fine woman. My sister says to me, "Come over here." I said, "Okay." She says, "I want to introduce you to my girlfriend." I did. This is so and so. That is how the doggone thing started, and I was only a junior in high school. It grew thicker and thicker. The year after I graduated, we got married. We have been together all of this time.

K: Since we are so close to Hillsville, did you hear anything about the Black Hand?

Z: I sure did, but I could never finger them. I used to talk to people who used to work. At the end of the month or whenever, they got their pay. They had to give so much to them. I do recall four or five years ago that they had an article in the Vindicator about Conti who worked in the City or County Courthouse for so many years down there. At one time, they shipped a whole bunch of stuff. They bought in a boxcar. They put them in a boxcar. Nobody knew exactly what happened. I suppose that they put him on a boat and sent him back, but I had talked to people who have had to give part of their pay every month. It was very strong, at one time. I suppose that you could not classify it as much as being the Black Hand as it as a group that took advantage of these people who were illiterate, and they had nobody to turn around to. That was easy picking.

Getting back to Quakertown, as you visualize things back in my time and then as you confront the situation today, it is alarming. Yet, when you get down to it, whether it is an industry or whether it is any other endeavor, as time flies by, things completely change. Sometimes, other individuals do not seem to have much control, even the government, like when I was a youngster. I used to live on the other side of the valley by the railroad and the river. Years ago, I used to watch Urskin Quarry. They would drop stones down . One carload full of stones would come down this incline. The other one went up. Then, there was another quarry down further. They called it Peanuts. Then, there was another quarry. They called it LePerry. Then, they had Carbon, and then, they had Johnson Quarry, which was a subsidiary of U.S. Steel in Bessemer. After sixty-some years, do you know how many are left?

K: None. There is one growing outside.

Z: I remember that one of the biggest tin mills around was in your hometown.

K: Yes, New Castle.

Z: New Castle. I remember when they had the old blast furnace. When I was on the Clipper last year, they were over on the their side. There was a big piece of steel that they put up that had come from New Castle. Myself, I worked in the old Mary Blast Furnace with Sharon Steel. It is gone now. The old Anne Furnace was in Struthers, but it is now gone also. I would venture to say that in the next couple of years, there will be nothing down on this side of Sheet and Tube.

I imagine that if we were like Rip Van Winkle who slept for one-hundred years. When he came back, there were drastic changes. What is so sad is that sometimes, you want to keep it from changing. It just does not seem to work that way. Sometimes, changes are for the good. Other times, they are detrimental and destructive.

As you visualize one-hundred and sixty years ago when the Quakers came to this part, there was nothing but barren land. Yet they cultivated it. They built nice homes, and they had so much to look forward to in the future, which they did. Anybody who ever had any doing or any opportunities to visit them know they are fine people, very interesting people. I just hope that some day the same spirit that prevailed when the Quakers come to Quaker Falls one-hundred and sixty years ago that the young generation would take the same attitude.

K: Were there many men from this area who were in the Second World War?

Z: Yes, in the Second World War, there were quite a few of them. Lowellville lost quite a few for a small town like Lowellville, Hillsville, and Bessemer. I was ready to go, but the thing that saved me was that at that particular time, I was working on the railroad and in the mill.

Another interesting thing back in those days in Quaker Falls was that there used to be a path down below where my folks lived. We used to cut through the woods, and you would end up down by an old powder plant. There was a bridge. You crossed that bridge, and that was where you caught the streetcar. In fact, when I was in seventh grade, one of my teachers, Mr. Strailor, used to come up on the streetcar. He would get off there and then, walk home in Carbon here. He was our teacher. That was many years ago.

K: You said that you had worked at Mary Furnace?

Z: Yes, I did.

K: What did you do there?

Z: I was on the railroad. I used to go down with the engine and couple up. We only had two on that. When I was in the yard, there was a conductor and two brakemen, but on the furnace job, you only had a conductor and a brakeman. I used to go down and hook up the engine. Then, we would pull it out and weigh it. Then, from there, we had to turn

around and get the ladies behind the engine and push them up to the open-hearth. From there sometimes, they would immediately dump it. If not, they would have stands. They would take the full ones and lay them on the stand. They would take the empty ones back, weigh them, and then, take the engine off and push them back. It was a good job.

Probably outside of my early life as a youngster that I enjoyed so tremendously in Quaker Falls and Carbon outside of the trip to Europe when I visited my folks, the next thing would be the years that I spent in that mill. It was so beautiful. It was always so interesting. You always had a lot of fun. Everybody knew each other. People got to work, and you never had many problems. I was president of the Union there for six years. Every once in a while, you would get something that was touchy. I would go to the management, and in a gentleman's way, I would present it. We always got it settled. I enjoyed doing it. I always give the management credit because they were willing to listen.

The men were very dedicated to their jobs. A lot of them worked there years. When something occurred, they were there. They knew what they were doing. They would get it done.

K: Did they have a baseball team?

Z: No, they never had any activities. Some of the guys would bowl in the different alleys. Then, once a year, they would have a picnic up on Route 224 in the old Rice Barn, which is still there. Outside of that, no. If you ever go up to River Road and you look in the fall when the leaves are falling, the old electric furnace that the U.S. government bought to put into that plant is still up there. That is one of the early electric furnaces that made Stanley Steel. From what I understand, most of that stuff during the war was like that. A lot of that was made into helmets that the soldiers wore.

K: We have covered a lot of ground. Is there anything that you want to add?

Z: I recall when I was a youngster that there used to be an oil wall down close to this old, stone house. I noticed recently that they are digging for oil close to the old cemetery up there. I had some property down along the river. The house that I sold down there has an oil well right in the back yard.

One year, school was out, and a bunch of us boys took a stroll. You know how kids are. Somebody said, "I dare you to go into the water." I said, "Sure, I will go in." I took my clothes off, and in my birthday suit, I jumped into that. I came out of there, and I was full of dust from the mill. That river was so dirty with all of that ore and stuff. You can go down there now, and it is pretty clean. In fact, if you have ever crossed the bridge in Lowellville and you see somebody on the bridge looking down into the river, they are watching fish. There are a lot of fish back in the river. That just goes to show you that from 1929, 1930 to 1985, fish are back again.

K: I would like to thank you for the interview.

Z: You are welcome. It was my pleasure.

End of Interview